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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: November 23, 2007

FPOe Wants Darabos to Resign

¶1. The opposition Freedom Party (FPOe) leader Heinz-Christian Strache has called for the resignation of Defense Minister Norbert Darabos over the latter's decision to have Austrian soldiers deployed to Chad on a peacekeeping mission. Referring to a recent internal Defense Ministry report describing the situation in Chad as "not quiet and not stable," Strache warned the mission could turn out to be "disastrous" for the soldiers. The Freedom Party has been lobbying against Austria's participation in the Chad peacekeeping efforts for week. High-ranking Austrian military representatives have backed Minister Darabos, however, stressing tht the Austrian troops will not be deployed to th "hotspots" nearChad's border with Sudan, accoring to a report in semi-official daily Wiener Zetung; other Austrian media.

Sharp Rise in DrugUse

¶2. An annual report on drug use says around .5 million Europeans are likely to have used cocaine in the past year - a million more than in 2006. The European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) says the increase in cocaine seizures and quantities also confirms its status as "Europe's stimulant drug of choice." The report also contains some disturbing news on Austria: It says deaths from drug overdoses have risen more than 30 percent over recent years, stated ORF TV's prime time news Zeit im Bild I on Thursday.

No Deal on Civil Servants' Pay

¶3. The third round of pay talks between the government and union officials for civil servants has ended without a deal. The government has described the union's demand for a 4 percent salary increase as too high. Finance Minister Wilhelm Molterer (OeVP) also said that that a 4 percent increase was exaggerated. Likewise, Doris Bures, the Minister for Public Services (SPOe), said the civil servants' demand would cost taxpayers an additional 406 million Euros, but she added that she was seeking a fair deal with the union. Union officials have meanwhile warned they might take action, ORF TV's prime time news Zeit im Bild I reported on Thursday.

Auf Wiedersehen, Oesterreich!

¶4. ... says outgoing US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw in a PAS-facilitated op-ed published by Austria's largest daily newspaper. The Ambassador's "good-byes to Austria are particularly bittersweet. I leave grateful for the time I spent in this beautiful and dynamic country and for the new friends I made. And I leave saddened that this rewarding and exciting chapter of my life has come to a close." Mass-circulation tabloid Kronen Zeitung published a PAS-facilitated op-ed by US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw on November 22. Recalling her experiences during the past two years in Vienna, Ambassador McCaw pointed out the 2006 U.S. - E.U. Summit, where US President George Bush "praised the strength of the Austrian-American relationship and then Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel described his far-reaching vision of the trans-Atlantic partnership." Among her rewarding experiences in Austria, McCaw emphasized, were also the "often lively discussions about American foreign policy I had with high school and university students throughout Austria. How we debated the best ways to promote freedom and protect the environment." During her ambassadorship, she "tried to meet with as many Austrians as possible. I have spoken with and listened to people working in government, academia and the arts, with journalists and students, with homemakers, shopkeepers and professionals. With each conversation, I learned a little more about Austria, its history, its values, its people." And with each conversation, the Ambassador underscored, "it became increasingly clear that Austria and the United States have long enjoyed a strong, cordial relationship. It also became clear that despite some disagreements, this relationship remains vital today. We are partners in countering terrorism, aiding developing nations, building a thriving global economy, and supporting democracies. And because no nation is perfect, there is also much we can learn from each other." The very strength of the US-Austrian bilateral relationship is based "on our shared values of democracy and human rights, on the vibrancy of our increasingly entwined economies, and on our mutual understanding and respect. And it has been the fostering of mutual understanding and respect" that she considers the hallmark of her tenure as Ambassador, and one of the reasons why McCaw vigorously promoted "academic and professional exchanges between our two countries." That is why June 5, 2007, was "one of the highlights of my ambassadorship." At the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Marshall Plan, "Austrian Minister of Economics

Martin Bartenstein and I signed a Memorandum of Understanding creating the Marshall Plan Scholarships, agreeing that this was "one of the best investments Austria and the United States could make to help ensure that our respect and friendship for each other will continue on for another generation." The past two years, Ambassador McCaw concluded, have been "a truly wonderful experience for my family and me, (...), and so I say good-bye to Austria. Thank you for your willingness to listen and to engage, for your warmth and for your hospitality," the Ambassador said.

Ambassador McCaw on Austria: The Country, the People, her Experiences

15. In an interview with a mass-circulation weekly, outgoing US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw emphasized that during her term of office in Austria she "learned to place high esteem on diplomacy, the importance of listening to different points of view regarding problems that concern all of us. My stay here has made clear to me the necessity to talk more with each other and listen more to each other." Her "wonderful memories of Austria" include its "unique landscapes, the family orientation of the Austrian people and their high esteem for art and culture," and the "wonderful concerts and museums." In an interview with mass-circulation weekly NEWS, published on November 22, US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw, asked about criticism of the current US administration, stressed that she "never took criticism personally. I am proud to represent my country and my administration here. Concerning Iraq, I faced the criticism and also the charges that we are not perfect. As the only remaining superpower, America is measured by very high standards. I'm not saying that is unfair, because we also measure ourselves by high standards. However, we are not always perfect in living up to them." Discussing the 2008 presidential elections in the US, the Ambassador said that she "would welcome a female President very much. There are many good role models. Hillary Clinton is not the woman I would support, though. I think Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would be wonderful. Unfortunately, traveling so extensively abroad she could not be involved in a stressful election campaign at home."

Ambassador's Farewell Visit with Austrian Government and Business Representatives

16. US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw paid her farewell visit to Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer (SPÖ) earlier this week. Briefly reporting on the issue, a mass-circulation newspaper points out that McCaw is leaving her post for "personal reasons." The Ambassador described her time in Austria as "one of the most remarkable and rewarding experiences of her life." She will be succeeded by businessman Charles Gargano. On the occasion of the farewell meeting between outgoing US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw and Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, the latter emphasized the United States' role as Europe's "most important partner for a united Europe." According to a report by Austrian Press Agency APA, Plassnik underscored that the US and the EU "are united by a mature transatlantic partnership, which enables us also to discuss openly those topics where we hold differing opinions. Close transatlantic cooperation rooted in equality is an integral part of our efforts towards sustainable solutions for international crisis regions, including the Middle East," Plassnik added. The Minister praised Ambassador McCaw's public diplomacy commitment to further strengthen US-Austrian ties, and emphasized the "long friendship" between the two countries, which was "based on the energetic and well-remembered American assistance in helping Austrians recover their diplomatic freedom and rebuild their economy after WWII." Economics Chamber President Christoph Leitl also thanked Ambassador McCaw for her "interest in and understanding for business matters, as well as her target-oriented commitment towards strengthening our bilateral economic ties." According to APA, the Ambassador had "mastered her tasks in Austria in an exemplary manner and has won many friends and a great deal of sympathy for her country," Leitl added.

Tightened US Immigration Control

17. A leading Austrian daily reported on November 21 that the US is expanding measures to collect biometric data from international travelers. Before the end of the year, all persons entering the United States from European Union member countries are to be finger-scanned to verify their identity, independent of whether they have obtained visas or not. Under the new regime, not only two (as currently the case), but all ten fingers are to be scanned. Affected by this measure are both persons from the EU's so-called "Visa Waiver" countries, as well as travelers from states with visa requirements for immigration to the US, according to liberal daily Der Standard on November 21.

Pakistan Suspended From Commonwealth

18. Pakistan has been suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations, after President Pervez Musharraf failed to meet a deadline to lift the state of emergency. The announcement was made at a meeting of Commonwealth foreign ministers in Uganda by Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon, who stressed that Pakistan was being suspended "pending restoration of democracy and the rule of law." The Pakistani Ambassador to the United States has meanwhile underscored that any decision of emergency rule was up to Pakistan itself, and that the country should "respond to its internal requirements," said ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal.

Europe: US Military Stays Because of Putin

19. ... says a leading Austrian daily in an analysis of the rather strained relations between NATO and Russia. Reporting from a PAS-facilitated NATO Tour, the daily's security affairs writer Burkhard Bischof explains that the Pentagon "has announced it will stop the planned reduction of US forces in Europe for the time

being, because of the 'reemergence of a strong Russia.'" This move "is a clear indication" that the US military may be beginning to prepare for a new confrontation with Moscow. The United States argues that "cooperation with Russia on all critical issues is still possible," but behind the scenes in Brussels NATO representatives have been "making no secret of their disappointment about Moscow's behavior in recent times." Nonetheless, even if Russia is a "difficult partner, NATO has no strategic alternative to cooperation and continued commitment," and the "good news is: for the Russians there is no alternative, either," centrist daily Die Presse quotes Bischof.

McCaw